

## ***A Summer Job Can Shape a Life***

I'm very grateful to have this opportunity to reminisce about the five summers between 1981 and 1985 in which I participated in ARS' student research apprenticeship and junior fellowship programs. Although it seems like a long time ago, the positive impact that experience had on my future education and employment opportunities has been simply tremendous.

In 1981, I was a high school junior in Eleanor Roosevelt High School's science and technology program in Greenbelt, Maryland. Although the program had whetted my appetite for science, I was finding that textbook learning could sometimes be dry and uninspiring. I was keen to do "real" scientific experiments, to explore the unknown, to broaden my horizons.

But enthusiasm can only get you so far in the employment jungle, and I was lacking in practical experience.

I was fortunate then to be accepted into USDA's research apprenticeship program in Beltsville, Maryland, and even more fortunate to have Dr. James D. Anderson as my adviser. Not only did he guide my work in an intelligent and interesting manner, but he also allowed me the freedom to design my own experiments and learn from the many mistakes that naturally followed.

Although I knew next to nothing about plant senescence—the events that trigger and precede plant death—I quickly became very interested in the topic and found that working in a laboratory could actually be a lot of fun. The days passed rapidly, and summer quickly came to an end.

The next year I became preoccupied with choosing a college and filling out the seemingly endless application forms this entails. Dr. Anderson was very helpful in providing me with professional references, and there is no doubt that his comments and my work experience were influential in helping me gain admission to a university.

I continued to be interested in science and decided to concentrate my university studies on biochemistry and molecular biophysics. Keen to continue my work at Beltsville, I was lucky enough to be able to do so during the summer breaks. In the years that followed, Dr. Autar Mattoo became my mentor, and my work adopted a more molecular emphasis.

Working with Dr. Mattoo proved to be a truly invaluable experience. He is one of the most dedicated and enthusiastic scientists with whom I have ever had the pleasure to work. It was with Dr. Mattoo I learned that a

successful career in science requires a commitment above and beyond that required by many other jobs. But the work was very exciting, and the summers passed quickly.

During my senior year of college, I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in molecular and cellular neuroscience. And after completing my degree, I became interested in a career in scientific journalism.

For the past 3 years, I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to work at the scientific journal *Nature* as an assistant and associate biology editor. My colleagues and I are responsible for selecting manuscripts that we feel may be suitable for our journal, initiating the peer-review process, and making final decisions regarding publication.

The job is very interesting because we read scientific papers on a wide variety of topics: cell biology, plant physiology, neurobiology, immunology, and structural biology. It's also very challenging because we have space to publish only about 10 percent of the manuscripts we receive.

We attend several international scientific conferences every year where we meet scientists and discuss their latest research. I find it a very enjoyable job, because I can still keep in touch with the latest research and continually expand my horizons. We always strive to make an important contribution to the quality of scientific publishing.

It may seem like my current career and my initial training at USDA are worlds apart, but the lessons I learned at USDA are the sort that last a lifetime: respect for your colleagues, independent thought, personal responsibility, and commitment to your work.

I've been fortunate in having outstanding teachers, mentors, doctoral advisers, and employers, but I'll always be especially grateful to USDA for giving me my first job and for the positive impact it has had on my life.

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